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KENNEDY RESPONDS TO WAL-MART'S CALL FOR MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE

I was pleased to hear that Wal-Mart CEO, H. Lee Scott, Jr. called on Congress to raise the minimum wage. When even the head of Wal-Mart, one of the most anti-worker companies in the world, says that a minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour is out of date, we know it's long past time for an increase.

Katrina has shined a spotlight on poverty in this country and showed us all just how much more work is to be done to achieve equality and fairness in this country. **37 million Americans are living in poverty, including 13 million children. As a country, we know we can do better.**

The minimum wage hasn't been increased since 1997, yet during that time Americans increasingly feel the squeeze of the Bush economy. Americans are spending 74 percent more on gas than they did in 2001, and oil prices will increase an additional 56 percent this winter.

I have pressed for years to secure an increase in the minimum wage for millions of working families in America. The most recent attempt, just last week, was voted down by the Republicans in the Senate, leaving millions of families to continue to struggle to put food on their tables and pay the rent.

Many have claimed that an increase in the minimum wage would hurt the business community, and yet as a head of the largest employer in the country with over 1.7 employees, Mr. Scott's announcement is an important signal, and I applaud him. I hope to work with him, and other business leaders, Democrats and Republicans, to make a reality and improve the lives of millions of hard working Americans.

If the CEO of Walmart can call for an increase in the minimum wage, the Republicans should follow suit on behalf of the millions of working men and women living in poverty.

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